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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR AF/S
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR JFRAZER
USDOC FOR AMANDA HILLIGAS
TREASURY FOR OREN WYCHE-SHAW
PASS USTR FLORIZELLE LISER
STATE PASS USAID FOR MARJORIE COPSON, ERIC LOKEN

¶E. O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: Can Black and White Farmers Join Forces?

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Zimbabwe's mostly white Commercial Farmers Union (CFU) and mostly black Indigenous Commercial Farmers Union (ICFU) have been holding informal discussions that could - one day - lead to a merger. Although there is much on both sides that might sidetrack this process, it could prove a significant new twist in Zimbabwe's racially-charged land debates. End summary.

Tale of Two Unions

¶2. (SBU) The two farmer bodies have been heading speedily in opposite directions. Since only about 600 white Zimbabweans are still farming, the CFU has shrunk dramatically since 2000; meanwhile, land redistribution has swelled the ICFU's ranks to perhaps 20,000 black commercial (referred to as A2) beneficiaries of land reform. Yet the CFU still has a vastly superior technical and administrative infrastructure.

¶3. (SBU) On several occasions, ICFU President Davison Mugabe and General Secretary Wilson Nyabonda told us they wanted a single multiracial union for all commercial farmers. They expressed hope that the CFU would eventually agree to a merger, or at least that some white farmers would begin to join ICFU on their own. Over the past year, in fact, 18 white farmers have broken ranks and enlisted in ICFU, which seeks to de-emphasize its indigenous origins and rename itself the Zimbabwe Commercial Farmers Union (ZCFU). Mugabe and Nyabonda admitted ICFU members would benefit immeasurably from CFU expertise.

CFU Leadership Ponders a Radical Move

¶4. (SBU) Until now, the CFU has resisted any ICFU overtures. Given its dwindling membership, the CFU is afraid the larger body would simply gobble it up. Some CFU members would not want to align with land reform beneficiaries, who have settled on white-owned farms without due process or compensation. A main plank of the CFU has been lobbying against, and of the ICFU encouraging, land reform. Still, both associations claim to be nonpolitical.

¶5. (SBU) Nonetheless, CFU President Doug Taylor-Freeme now tells us he has been holding informal talks with the ICFU's Mugabe. Taylor-Freeme is considering a proposal to his board for a closer association and potential merger with the ICFU. The CFU President recognizes he would be leading his association down a radical path, that he would antagonize many CFU members. He admitted that white farmers from the more militant Justice for Agriculture (JAG) would view this gesture as the ultimate capitulation.

Why the CFU Could Support It

¶6. (SBU) Taylor-Freeme's pro-merger arguments are as follows. CFU and ICFU members are both farmers and businessmen, sharing similar interests for better-functioning markets. He cannot hope to lobby more effectively on behalf of an-ever shrinking number of active farmers. Speaking the local language and having spent his whole life in Zimbabwe, Taylor-Freeme wants to go nowhere else. He places a priority on saving Zimbabwe's final 600 white-owned farms (and an additional 500 where the white family no longer farms but still remains on the land) rather than seeking restitution for the approximately 3,400 already dispossessed - many of whom have emigrated. Although many dispossessed farmers, especially JAG members, pin their hopes on fair compensation for land, equipment and homes, Taylor-Freeme doubts they will ever see fair compensation in their

lifetimes.

17. (SBU) From the closer association, Taylor-Freeme wants GOZ land acquisitions to end, preserving the final 600 white farms. The GOZ, CFU and ICFU would work together to resettle new farmers from the other 500 farms still occupied by whites, enabling former farmers to begin work again. This would mean 1,100 active white-owned farms, down from a pre-land reform 4,500. In return, Taylor-Freeme would make all CFU resources available to ICFU members and put structures in place for white farmers to assist indigenous counterparts.

Comment

18. (SBU) Taylor-Freeme, who will be in Washington May 28-June 9 for the World Farmers Congress, has his work cut out for him trying to sell the proposal to the CFU. He is more farmer than polished lobbyist. Taylor-Freeme also seeks to strengthen the hand of GOZ moderates - particularly Reserve Bank Governor Gideon Gono and Lands Minister John Nkomo - who are encouraging him to move in this direction. In fact, the GOZ's so-called Utete Commission report proposes a single commercial farmer body. GOZ hardliners probably prefer the departure of all remaining white farmers. Taylor-Freeme is aware that the CFU's hand is far stronger now than it will be in two year's time, after more of his technical staff will have departed and the GOZ will have expropriated more farms.

19. (SBU) The Embassy, on friendly terms with the leaderships of both farm associations, will encourage this dialogue. We recognize that a voluntary CFU-ICFU alliance or merger would not go down well with certain white and black Zimbabweans. It presupposes, perhaps dubiously, that the GOZ will sign on to a negotiated compromise that reaffirms the status of some white farmers. But we believe it makes sense for Zimbabwe to find a way to retain whatever white farmer skills it can at this late stage, while recognizing that the country will not return to the pre-land reform status quo.

Sullivan